

around the aerodrome in August. I might mention here that one of my earliest memories of this fine bird is as a boy when I watched at close range three pairs excavating nest holes near Jasdan. This year I have heard them over Rajkot in late May and they have been heard at Jasdan and so they must have been breeding in the area, or possibly passing onto their breeding location near Bhavnagar.

14, JAYANT SOCIETY,
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LAVKUMAR J. KHACHER

10. A DAY AT A NEST OF THE GREAT BLACK
WOODPECKER (*DRYOCOPUS JAVENSIS*)
(With two plates)

On a five-day visit to the Periyar Wild Life Sanctuary during the second week of January, 1974, I concentrated on a search for the Great Black Woodpecker which had so far eluded me. On the second day I ran into Mr Robert Horwich, an American researcher on primate behaviour, who said that he had seen a Black Woodpecker almost at that very spot earlier in the morning. Still, in spite of spending three more days at Thekkady I had to leave without so much as a glimpse of the Black Woodpecker.

About a fortnight later Mr Nanu Nair, Wild Life Preservation Officer, Thekkady, informed me that Mr Horwich had found an occupied nest of the Black Woodpecker close to the Picnic Spot. So, at 17.45 hrs on the 2nd of February I was back at the place where Mr Horwich and I had first met on 12-i-1974. There Mr Nanu Nair pointed out a giant tree, quite dead and devoid of all bark, just 20 feet away. At a height of c. 20 m and very near the top was the woodpecker's nest, with the female peeping out. It was on the southern side of the tree, just below a large, shallow, irregular cavity. We were to discover the next day that almost all day the sun fell directly on the nest.

The tree stood in the midst of a good stand of medium sized deciduous trees and dense, thorny underground on a narrow strip of land between the road and an arm of the lake. Hardly a stone's throw from the road, it was exposed to all the noises of busy traffic, loud talk and other evidences of flourishing tourism.

That evening we were able to watch the nest for 55 minutes only (1745 to 1840 hrs). At 1805 hrs the male came and alighted on a tree trunk c. 10 m ESE of the nest. While hopping up he uttered a few very low *quack* notes. The moment the male alighted on the nest tree, the female flew out with a smooth glide, quite noiselessly. The male entered the nest at 1807 hrs after thrusting his bill smartly 3 or 4 times into

the cavity. Almost all the time between 1807 and 1840 hrs he was looking out of the nest. A minute after he had got in, a pair of Hill Mynas (*Gracula religiosa*) alighted on the horizontal branch below the nest and went on calling. They then flew to a tree close by, and one of them was seen flying into some hollow on the northern side of the woodpeckers' tree. The mynas never approached the woodpeckers' nest and the woodpecker seemed to ignore them. Mr Horwich, however, said that on some days he had seen Hill Mynas going to the woodpeckers' nest and being chased away by the woodpecker.

On 3-ii-1974 I watched the nest for a total of 8 hours and 15 minutes (0750 to 1300, 1500 to 1700, and 1740 to 1845 hrs). Mr Horwich who had kindly agreed to take photographs for me was with me all forenoon and again during the last session (with Mr Nanu Nair as well). The photographs were taken with a Nikkormat camera and a 400 mm telephoto lens.

A brief account of what I saw during the day follows:

0750 to 0915: Nest appeared to be unoccupied, but in fact the female was in.

0915—7 to 8 dull taps (low *dok-dok-dok*) from the east, repeated 3 times. Two minutes later the male came from the east and alighted on the trunk of a tree east of the nest tree. At 0921 he flew to the nest tree alighting 6 feet below the hole and began hopping up. The moment he had alighted on the nest tree, the female thrust her head out, uttered a number of '*chyank's*' in quick succession and at 0923 flew off to the east. The male entered and remained till 1235 hrs.

At 1220 came a series of dull taps from inside the nest, 5 to 8 taps at a time, repeated thrice. This was followed by a rapid series of dull du-du-du-du notes (drumming?).

At 1230 hrs the female alighted on the trunk of a teak NW of the nest tree and began hopping up quite silently. She then uttered a number of low *quacks* to which the male replied with feebler notes. She flew to the nest tree at 1235, alighting just below the nest. The male flew off at once and his place was taken by the female.

The nest was not watched between 1300 and 1500 hrs. At 1500 hrs the female was in the nest, peeping out. Ten minutes later she withdrew her head. At 1520 she began looking around and withdrew into the hole only at 1534. The male came from the south at 1550 to a tree SSE of the nest. Simultaneously the female peeped out. To a few low *chyup* notes of the male the female responded with a few dull taps on the wall of the nest. The male flew to the nest tree and the female flew off at once. He went into the nest and turned a somersault so that his head appeared where his 'forked' tail had been a moment ago.

At 1608 a flock of 4 or 5 Hills Mynas flew past the woodpecker tree, landed on another 11 m away and went on uttering an amazing

variety of calls. The woodpecker did not react to all this, but he seemed to look around nervously when some Bluewinged Parakeets flew past with their harsh calls, when a dog barked and again when someone banged lustily on a wooden picnic table.

The male woodpecker began to produce a series of dull taps from within and then peeped out, looking in all directions. He repeated this a number of times during the next two minutes, each series of taps being louder and more rapid than the preceding. Between 1635 and 1638 he not only played a tattoo on the inner wall, but seemed to throw something out with smart flicks of the bill after a spell of tapping. At 1638 the hammering became louder though the rate was lower. The last series of taps, a rapid *chug-chug-chug-chug* was at 1639, after which for 20 minutes, he was inactive.

From 1700 to 1740 hrs we were away and on our return found the male looking out and a Hill Myna calling loudly from the branch below the nest. At 1743 the myna left. The female woodpecker arrived at 1753, flying from the south straight to the nest tree. As she began hopping up, the male beat a tattoo of dull taps from within and then flew off to the south. The female entered the nest and remained hidden within till 1802 hrs when a pair of Hill Mynas alighted on the branch below the nest. Even then the female woodpecker did not peep out. Five minutes later one of the mynas flew to the top of the tree from where it uttered various screeches, whistles and croaks. At 1813, before we knew what was happening, the female woodpecker had come out and was chasing the mynas. She pursued them from tree to tree without uttering any call notes and, quite as suddenly as she had come out, went into her nest leaving the mynas on two different trees. The mynas went on calling loudly.

At 1814 hrs a loud but dull drumming came from the east. The mynas returned to the branch below the nest and were very noisy. A couple of Southern Tree Pies had appeared meanwhile and were contributing their mite to the clamour.

At 1822 hrs the woodpecker shot out of the nest and again drove the mynas away. After chasing them around for a minute, she returned and went straight into the nest. One of the mynas flew at 1825 into the hollow on the nest tree into which a myna had gone the previous day. The other myna went on calling from a tree close to the nest. At 1828 the appearance of the female woodpecker's head at the nest entrance coincided with a loud drumming from the east. The second myna also disappeared into the hollow behind the nest at 1830. Just then the male woodpecker alighted on a tree SE of the nest (these woodpeckers did not seem to have a definite 'route' to the nest) and male and female held a duet of low *chiank-chiank-chiank* notes. Uttering the same low sounds, the male flew to the nest tree at 1837, his arrival



The nest tree.
(Photo: Robert Horwich)

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Neelakantan: Nest of the Black Woodpecker

PLATE II

